

Priesthood of Kings

On the Illiberal Theology of Thomas Hobbes and Carl Schmitt

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Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* was conceived in difficult circumstances.¹ He had watched his country struggle through civil war, battered by social unrest and torn asunder in theological turmoil. If Hobbes had overtly questioned the political relevance of religion, or banished doctrinal confession to the private realm (as John Locke would so ably argue), he would have been offering some version of that familiar modern solution "separation of church and state." But curiously, Hobbes preferred to solve the problem of religion with *stronger* religion: a theocracy. In his Christian world, there was only one denomination which consistently claimed to represent God himself to his people. So Hobbes needed Roman Catholic authority, and would not rest until his Civil Sovereign had been invested as the Pope – prophet, priest, and king.

Hobbes' 20th century acolyte, Carl Schmitt, thought similarly. Schmitt's works were also provoked by social and political unrest; he wasted no time in blaming Protestantism and its unmanageable progeny, political liberalism and *laissez-faire* economics. He proposed as antidote a centralized authority concentrated in representative Sovereignty, equipped to create, interpret, and enforce law, define friends against enemies, demand unqualified obedience for unlimited protection, crush dissent and quell dispute. This "decisionist" political form could (and perhaps should) exist in society as secularized power, but Schmitt insisted that at root it was derived from a specific theological framework – that exhibited by the conservative Roman Catholic Church.

Both men came to the same conclusion, and used the same church as inspiration and model. But Schmitt was a convinced Roman Catholic, a serious and sincere advocate. Hobbes, on the other hand, excoriated the Pope and mocked Catholic devotion. What is most significant then is their apparent consensus on a point obviously not predicated upon either personal

¹ This paper is dedicated, with warm gratitude, to Drs. James Yeager, James Martel, and Joseph Shannon.

conviction or formal affiliation: Politics is theological, and statesmen should merely consider *which* theology is best suited to their ends. For these two thinkers separated by circumstances, centuries, cultures, and a continent, nothing was more obvious than the fact that specific theological patterns fostered liberalism and others promoted illiberalism. They took great pains to select the latter over the former.

A Few Clarifications

This unorthodox interpretation of Hobbes' work may provoke a few obvious objections which deserve some preliminary clarification. First, I do not wish to argue that Thomas Hobbes was a Roman Catholic, that he approved of the Roman Catholic Church, or that the Roman Catholic Church approved of him, all of which is immediately refuted by historical and empirical evidence. Hobbes deplored superstition, questioned revelation, refused to conceal his disdain for clerics of all persuasions, and in spite of obsequious protests to the contrary, persisted in various theological pronouncements and private interpretations of Scripture which are obviously outside the bounds of traditional Christianity, leading many scholars to assume that he was agnostic or perhaps even atheist, despite his formal Anglican affiliation.

What Hobbes actually believed in the depth of his heart is of no concern here, but his formal convictions are highly relevant politically, and by no means theologically impartial. Hobbes criticized the Catholics and Protestants in unequal measure, for instance. His scorn for Presbyterian insubordination, protests against authority, and demands for accountability, was substantive and principled. His animosity toward Catholic power, however, was focused more upon perceived usurpation rather than fundamental error, suggesting that he had a stronger Catholic sensibility than Protestant. Moreover, it is somewhat implausible that a man so

deliberate and precise in his adoption of definitions, names, and symbols would carelessly or inadvertently identify his Civil Sovereign with Catholic titles, office, and rank. Seething resentments aside, Hobbes had a profound philosophic affinity for the authority which was claimed, however improperly, by Rome.

Secondly, I do not argue that the Roman Catholic Church is an inherently illiberal institution, or that all Roman Catholics are politically illiberal. This is a sensitive issue, and one which is complicated by the proudly unequivocal statements of Catholics such as Carl Schmitt, that their religion is by nature incompatible with liberalism. Perhaps it is sufficient to state that there are also celebrated Roman Catholics who have maintained the opposite,² and many more among the ranks of laity (particularly in America) who quietly hold a liberal understanding of faith and governance. The political implications of official Roman Catholic doctrine have always been subject to prevalent culture, both inside and outside the Church, and determined by historical circumstance and expediency.

The Roman Catholic Church is ancient and august, but no monolith, either in the totality of its history or in any particular time period. From the Patristic era up to the high-Middle Ages, for instance, the Church enjoyed a liberal aspect of “doctrinal pluralism”³ very similar to that old Roman/Greco culture of philosophic “disputation” which so infuriated Thomas Hobbes.⁴ And it is quite possible to argue that this last century has ushered in a new Roman Catholic liberalism, one which signals a renewal and return to this ancient path. But what happened in the middle was

² John Courtney Murray, Michael Novak, among others.

³ Pelikan, Jaroslav. *Reformation of church and dogma (1300-1700)*. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1983. Print. 1,10-68

⁴ Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan: or, The matter, forme, & power of a common-wealth ecclesiasticall and civill*. New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 2004. Print. 46:7-12

reactionary – first to ecclesiastical confusion at Avignon (1378-1414), and then violently to the Protestant Reformation (1517), that cataclysm which divided the Church along a strained fault line and, with Hegelian force, drove both parties away from each other toward extremes, liberal and illiberal. This is the historical and philosophical context in which Thomas Hobbes writes.

As to the term “liberalism,” definition is difficult, not least because its distinguishing marks have often been better perceived and communicated by opponents than adherents. More complicated still, liberalism expresses a philosophic approach to governance which transcends religious dialogue, oversteps the misleading dichotomy “liberal/conservative,” and probably predates the modern era in which the movement was formally named. Most problematic of all, the usual themes associated with liberalism – personal freedoms and rights, emphasis upon “consent,” equality, natural law – have many times been championed by those who oppose liberalism, a disconcerting overlap of terms which suggests that the debate between liberals and illiberals is fought over *location* and *arrangement* of fundamental principles rather than the principles themselves.

The battle is over freedom – the power to decide what is good (immaterial), and the power to do it (material). Both parties agree that the final goal is a “right,” “correct,” or “ideal” ordering of our lives, both distinguish between individual and collective realizations of that “right,” and both argue that certain political arrangements encourage certain realizations while impeding others. In other words, liberals and illiberals share the use of the terms “individual,” “collectivity,” and “right;” they simply disagree upon location. Liberalism arranges them – right, individual, collectivity – reflecting a primary confidence in the individual, to decide for himself what is right and to attain it. The collectivity exists in order to support, encourage, and enable the proper environment in which individuals may continue to do so, relatively unmolested.

Illiberalism arranges the terms – right, collectivity, individual – reflecting a primary confidence in the collectivity, to decide for individuals what is right and to attain it for them. The individual exists in order to support, encourage, and enable the proper environment in which the collectivity may continue to do so. Whether solitary actors are entirely swallowed up into the aggregate (Rousseau), or permitted to snatch the crumbs left over after an authoritarian orgy (Hobbes), illiberalism always demands that the individual serve the collective first. And whether the collectivity is completely shattered in anarchic individualism (Thoreau), or retained as a grudging last resort against the dysfunctional who persist in behaving more like wild animals than humans (Locke), liberalism always demands that the collective serve the individual first.

In this fight for freedom, both sides consider themselves to be victorious, which is a particularly counterintuitive point for certain liberals who blithely assume that they own “liberty,” and claim (with supercilious fanfare) all its attendant rights, privileges, and superiorities. The labels “liberal” and “illiberal,” however helpful, are derived from framing the given debate in only one of many possible ways. It is only if we define “liberty” and “authority” in a completely materialistic fashion, as the exercise or absence of physical power, and only if we orient those said terms in relation to the individual rather than any other entity – only then is one perspective aptly described as “liberal,” and a champion of liberty, or “libertarian.” Only then is the opposite viewpoint considered “illiberal,” a champion of authority, or “authoritarian.”

Hobbes on Liberty

Thomas Hobbes was a perceptive man; he strongly disapproved of slanted liberal definitions. By his calculations, the exercise of liberty cannot long survive the absence of authority. In this sense then, formidable authority figures generally *promote* the cause of

freedom, while those who clamor for “too great Liberty”⁵ quickly find themselves with none at all.⁶ Frustrated with declarations to the contrary, and appalled at the hopeless mess of misunderstandings cluttering the proper definition of freedom, Hobbes wrote his *Leviathan* as a defense of illiberal liberty, to set the political record straight, propose a peaceful solution for conflict, and above all to correct popular assumptions about liberty and liberalism which even then were common enough.

It is inaccurate, for instance, to confuse liberalism with democracy, or to assume that under democratic governance, people enjoy liberty, “but that in a Monarchy they are all Slaves.”⁷ Hobbes blamed the ancient “democratical” writers for this suggestion, particularly Aristotle, who allegedly wrote that, “*In democracy, Liberty is to be supposed: for ‘tis commonly held, that no man is Free in any other Government.*”⁸ Hobbes shortly countered that the amount of freedom is the same, “whether a Commonwealth by Monarchical, or Popular” rule. As long as the ultimate political authority can be wielded without check, it simply does not matter whether the arrangement is monarchical, aristocratic, or democratic. Hobbes generously adds, “Of the three sorts, which is best, is not to be disputed.”⁹

They must on no account be mixed, however. Various combinations of all three elements (such as the republican structures established by the American founders) divide pure authority and prevent any one dynamic, whether monarchical, aristocratic, or democratic, from acting in an unaccountable or unilateral manner. Hobbes hated these mixed forms, which he angrily

⁵ *Lev.* Epistle Dedicatory

⁶ *Lev.* 21:6

⁷ *Lev.* 29:14

⁸ *Lev.* 21:9

⁹ *Lev.* 42:82

dubbed “mixarchy.”¹⁰ They automatically built into politics a culture of conflict, warfare, and dysfunction, when the intended aim of governance, by almost anyone’s estimation, was peace and order without which freedom could not exist. In the very interests of liberty, “Sovereign Power, whether placed in One Man, as in Monarchy, or in one Assembly of men, as in Popular, and Aristocratical Commonwealths,” must be made “as great, as possibly men can be imagined to make it.”¹¹

The liberty which Hobbes enumerates is collective, not individual. The Commonwealth is free to judge, to legislate, to punish, to resist and invade, but the freedom of “Particular men,” to act apart or against the collectivity, is another matter. Hobbes states that this liberty depends upon “the Silence of the Law. In cases where the Sovereign has prescribed no rule, there the Subject hath the Liberty to do, or forbear, according to his own discretion.”¹² But since the Sovereign has the theoretical right to pronounce on all matters, this liberty could be very limited indeed. If freedom is the power to decide what is good (immaterial), and the power to do it (material), Hobbes gives the collectivity, represented in its Sovereign, absolute freedom. He grants individuals the remainder (if there is one): a conditional and derivative freedom.

Among the inevitable liberal howls of protest at this formula, Hobbes seems most bemused by their vaunted ability to choose what is right. The power of every man to perceive by reason what is best for him, to obey its dictates, and pursue its prize – this is the very source and fount of all individualist sympathies. And Hobbes eagerly agrees that “all the voluntary actions of men tend to the benefit of themselves” – they do so at the behest of “Reason, which dictateth

¹⁰ Hobbes, Thomas, Ferdinand Tönnies, and Stephen Holmes. *Behemoth; or, The long Parliament*. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1990. Print. 116-117

¹¹ *Lev.* 20:18

¹² *Lev.* 21:8,18

to every man his own good.”¹³ The actions which men voluntarily do proceed from the will, and therefore “they proceed from *liberty*... Yet, because every act of man’s will, and every desire, and inclination proceedeth from some cause... they proceed from *necessity*.”¹⁴ Hobbes can’t fathom how it is possible to derive a concept of unbridled liberty from that of “necessity.”

We are not free to act apart from our strongest desire. We are not free to desire that which is not in our interest. We are not free to move if deterred by external impediments. And we are not free to do anything at all if God has not willed it.¹⁵ Even *naturally*, men may begin in “freedom,” but with each passing minute of their lives, with each desire and deliberation and action, they lose more and more of it.¹⁶ This entire theme of determinism was a particularly cruel and clever attack on the predominately Calvinist liberals of his day. Hobbes’ thorough insistence on this point, combined with frequent statements on God’s salvific sovereignty and man’s miserable state,¹⁷ has understandably misled many scholars (and contemporaries) into thinking him some sort of Calvinist – possibly a nasty, brutish one.

But Jonathan Edwards said, not so. The 18th century American theologian wrote a short philosophic treatise on the *Freedom of the Will* in which he answered certain objections to his Calvinist doctrine of necessity, among them that “it agrees with the opinions of Mr. Hobbes.” Edwards wrote, “We need not reject all truth which is demonstrated by clear evidence, merely because it was once held by some bad man,” and quickly added that “the Arminians agree with

¹³ Lev. 15:4

¹⁴ Lev. 21:4

¹⁵ Lev. 6:53/21:2/14:2/21:4

¹⁶ Lev. 6:50

¹⁷ Lev. 13:8-9/14:31/17:2/21:4/26:40/43:7

Mr. Hobbes in many more things than the Calvinists.”¹⁸ Jacobus Arminius was a 17th century Dutch theologian who affirmed that man had the power to turn toward salvation on his own accord, by his own “free-will.” The Calvinists, by contrast, denied man this ability and consistently maintained that he is by nature “totally depraved,” bound in sin, and entirely at God’s mercy.

Hobbes on Pessimism and Fear

Hobbes’ dark diagnosis was faux Calvinist. His “ill condition” wherein all men by nature desire what is not theirs and engage in competitive, grasping, relentless, inevitable war of all against all,¹⁹ his state of misery in which all men by nature know the Laws of Nature but refuse to keep them,²⁰ his reign of inescapable terror, pride, revenge, and violence – all of this goes away like a bad dream. With mild nonchalance, Hobbes presents “a possibility to come out of it,” partly by man’s passions, partly through his reason.²¹ Man can save himself; he can reorient his “passions” away from strife toward peace, he can rest content with fewer goods and less liberty, he can live in harmony with others and rely on their good faith to do the same. For Hobbes confidently believes in “the goodness of a man’s own natural Reason.”²²

His notorious pessimism is a response to man’s “State of Nature,” which exists as a possible rather than necessary threat. But man’s reason is not entirely defunct – he can be reasoned with; he can be convinced that his “natural” behavior is self-destructive, and be turned

¹⁸ Edwards, Jonathan. *Freedom of the will*. East Peoria, IL: Eremitical Press, 2009. Print. Part 4, Section VI

¹⁹ *Lev.* 13:8-9

²⁰ *Lev.* 27:4,23/17:2

²¹ *Lev.* 13:4

²² *Lev.* 26:28

from enmity toward amity. This conviction is central to Hobbes' thought, and it is breathtakingly optimistic. It is also the philosophic bedrock of all grand illiberal programs for social and political reconstruction. Those who believe that man can be persuaded, cajoled, misled, molded and/or forced to appreciate what is good for him, tend to approve of strong centralized incentives to that end. The perfectibility of mankind, both collective and individual, lies tantalizingly within grasp and begs only the proper impetus to drive men in grateful droves toward their salvation.

Fear is all that is required. According to Hobbes, men will not voluntarily lay down their arms, relinquish their rights, or surrender freedom without "fear of some evil consequence."²³ Whether he sincerely believed in the so-called "State of Nature," or even in man's alleged brutishness, Hobbes could only justify the absolute power of his Sovereign if the alternative was obviously far worse.²⁴ So where his arch-nemeses taught the populace "to hate monarchy,"²⁵ Hobbes *enjoined* monarchy – a focused and centralized authority with absolute power. He impressed upon them fear of freedom, fear of others, and fear of themselves,²⁶ triggering an urgent demand for "protection" in order to ask an otherwise outrageous price for it: unqualified obedience.²⁷

There will always be those, however, who fear God more than man.²⁸ Hobbes solemnly concedes that "the gods were first created by human Fear,"²⁹ and that in the absence of a strong Civil Sovereign, men can rely on no other mainstay for their peace than "fear of that Invisible

²³ *Lev.* 14:7/17:2

²⁴ *Lev.* 18:20/20:14/20:18/21:5/30:7/46:35

²⁵ *Lev.* 21:9

²⁶ *Lev.* 13:5

²⁷ *Lev.* 21:21

²⁸ *Matthew* 10:28

²⁹ *Lev.* 12:5-6

Power, which they every one Worship as God.”³⁰ But for him, fear of an *invisible* God is obviously not sufficient to reduce petulant subjects to unified obedience and worship, else it would be manifest. Hobbes insists instead upon fear of a *visible* God, a tangible, physical, immanent Power, a personal deity close at hand and within our midst, a “great Leviathan, or rather (to speak more reverently)...that Mortal God, to which we owe under the Immortal God, our peace and defense.”³¹

Hobbes on Religion in Politics

This is the turning point of *Leviathan*, and all else falls under the shadow cast by such a formidable ecclesiastical aegis. Whether Hobbes liked religion, believed in religion, or wanted it, he *needed* it. In *Behemoth* he wearily confessed, “‘Tis not in man’s power to suppress the power of religion,”³² and such statements have led many to interpret the theological sections of *Leviathan* (well over half the book) as a condescending gesture of resignation to the culture in which he lived and a valiant effort to turn it toward his ends. This conventional analysis is generally accompanied by bowdlerized reconstructions of the work which marginalize the religious content in order to present the purely secularist vision Hobbes no doubt wished to render, had he been free to do so.

But *Leviathan* reads in exactly the opposite fashion; theological symbolism and Scriptural exegesis dominate the “secularist” bits. Moreover, religion imparts to the Civil Sovereign a holy aura of mystique, awe, reverence, and worship which is indispensable to Hobbes’ specifically illiberal scheme. The governed owe no flatly economic expression of

³⁰ *Lev.* 14:31

³¹ *Lev.* 17:13

³² *Beh.* Dialogue 2, p. 82

contractual consent to their Sovereign – they owe him trembling gratitude, abject prostration, and unconditional surrender, because he literally saved them from themselves. Hobbes found from Scripture that “To be saved, is to be secured, either respectively against special Evils, or absolutely, against all Evil, comprehending Want, Sickness, and Death itself.”³³ He extrapolated from this that Sovereign is he who has power either “to save, or destroy,”³⁴ he in whom all men therefore live and move and have their being.³⁵

Secularist legitimacy based solely upon “consent” can never adequately capture this heightened role of the-state- as-Savior. But in fact most illiberal programs heavily rely upon similar theological formulas in order to communicate the Messianic nature of their salvific character. These crusades often express strong moral indignance over the gross sins of individuals, and offer hope and redemptive grace through the auspices of the State. Strong overtures of care, protection, and provision are extended to the collectivity, usually at the expense of personal liberty and private initiative, both of which are generally viewed as insubordinate threats to the wellbeing of the community. Hobbes’ *Leviathan* stands solidly within this larger tradition of illiberal political theology.

Hobbes on Corporate Salvation

The concept of corporate security is an ancient one, particularly from the vantage of religion. St. Cyprian (4th century) famously thundered, “Extra Ecclesia nulla salus,” or “There is no salvation outside the Church.” His statement was memorable, but hardly sensational; Christianity has always conditioned the faithful to highly prize the safety of God’s community,

³³ *Lev.* 38:15

³⁴ *Lev.* 20:4/30:11

³⁵ *Lev.* Introduction:1

beyond which is outer darkness, weeping and gnashing of teeth, chaos, violence, and terror.³⁶

The precise definition of this community, however, is entirely subject to debate. The Protestants, for instance, who fled the Church in order to form their own, continued to maintain that salvation resides within the church, but they were also compelled to define “church” in a more carefully creative manner. The arena outside which no man can be saved could be regarded more spiritual than physical.

But in the late Middle Ages, the opposite interpretation had gained traction. Pope Boniface VIII (*Unam Sanctam*, 1302) expanded on Cyprian’s remark: “We declare, say, define, and pronounce that it is absolutely necessary for the salvation of every human creature to be subject to the Roman Pontiff.” By this and other similar pronouncements, the Church was beginning to prohibit nuanced, spiritual definitions of God’s community, deny the possibility of pleasing God outside the physical confines of the Church, and condemn any expressions of faith which did not also include unqualified submission to the Pope. The mode was twofold: to emphasis visible realities over invisible, and to subject all of what was visible to one earthly Sovereign.

Thomas Hobbes employs this same strategy and also has no compunction moving beyond it. He can’t completely deny the invisible, nor denigrate the power of personal and private belief,³⁷ but he does categorically insist that “the Kingdom of God is real, not a metaphorical Kingdom; and so taken, not only in the Old Testament, but the New.”³⁸ His theological stances share in that same well-documented spirit of materialism of *Leviathan* Part I,³⁹ so much so that

³⁶ Matthew 8:12

³⁷ Lev. 27:2/37:13/40:2/42:43/42:80

³⁸ Lev. 35:11

³⁹ Lev. 1:4/2:8/4:22/6:7

Hobbes often overreaches: “God is great, but it is impossible to understand greatness without a body. Not even the Nicene Council defined it that God is incorporeal.”⁴⁰ Throughout the work, his primary aim is to drag God and all things intangible (such as faith, judgment, natural law, power, authority, goodness, justice, unity, peace, etc.) out of the shadows of spiritual invisibility into the “clearer light” of physical visibility.⁴¹

Hobbes on Divine Right and Representation

Hobbes’ secondary aim is to subject all this visible matter to centralized authority. He does not conceal his own personal preference for monarchy over the other two political structures, and he consistently maintains that “the right of all sovereigns, is derived originally from the consent of every one of those that are to be governed.”⁴² Much has been made of this voluntary, and popular, nomination in Hobbes’ thought, but far less of his accompanying premise that the political monarchy embodies “*the sovereign power of God* over any subjects acquired by their own consent.”⁴³ Hobbes is painfully clear on this matter: “Christian kings have their civil power from God immediately.”⁴⁴ They govern “by Divine Right; that is, by authority immediate from God,” or “*jure divino*.”⁴⁵

There is no question that the civil Sovereign represents the Commonwealth, in a highly secular, consent-based manner.⁴⁶ But according to Hobbes, this representation is simply a

⁴⁰ Hobbes, Thomas, and E. M. Curley. "Chapter Three." *On Certain Objections against Leviathan*. Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 1994. 538-548. Print.

⁴¹ *Lev.* 29:15

⁴² *Lev.* 42:123

⁴³ *Lev.* 35:1

⁴⁴ *Lev.* 42:110

⁴⁵ *Lev.* 40:9/42:71/42:80

⁴⁶ *Lev.* 16:13-14/17:13-14/31:5

political secularization of an ancient religious precedent whereby God “reigneth by his Vicar, or Lieutenant.”⁴⁷ God is King, and Hobbes does not prevaricate on this point: “Whether men will or not, they must be subject always to the Divine Power. By denying the Existence, or Providence of God, men may shake off their Ease, but not their Yoke.”⁴⁸ Men must not, however, *directly* interact with the Deity, as if they were all individually beckoned into the throne room of God. “There is no Covenant with God, but by mediation of some body that representeth God’s Person; which none doth but God’s Lieutenant, who hath Sovereignty under God.”⁴⁹

The representative of God is accorded such deference, obedience, and worship,⁵⁰ that for all practical intents and purposes, “God’s Person on Earth”⁵¹ is treated as if he *were* God. The Reformation Protestants always regarded this “vicar” premise a purely semantic sleight of hand, and often claimed that the Pope was *antichrist*. But Hobbes finds this accusation hysterical and groundless: “*Antichrist* in the proper signification hath two essential marks; One, that he denieth Jesus to be Christ; and another that he professeth himself to be Christ...Now seeing the Pope of Rome, neither pretendeth himself, nor denieth Jesus to be the Christ, I perceive not how he can be called Antichrist.” Hobbes’ generous defense of Rome on this point highlights a fundamental congruity of role between his Civil Sovereign and the Pope; they both maintain their right to give laws, “not *as Christ*, but *as for Christ*, wherein there is nothing of *The Antichrist*.”⁵²

Christ himself was a representative of God. Hobbes is very careful not to deny the deity of Christ, but he never overtly asserts it either. His notorious formulation of the Trinity has God

⁴⁷ Lev. 38:5

⁴⁸ Lev. 31:2

⁴⁹ Lev. 18:3

⁵⁰ Lev. 45:13

⁵¹ Lev. 40:7/45:17

⁵² Lev. 42:87

being “represented” by three persons: the Father (by Moses), the Son (by Christ), and the Holy Spirit (by the apostles and their successors).⁵³ This provocative definition implies that Moses, Christ, and the apostles enjoyed economic equality; it may also insinuate an ontological equality, although Hobbes never says so directly. Doctrinal peculiarities aside, what is most important here for his thought regards a rather compelling argument which is also held by the Church of Rome: At no point has God ever governed, revealed himself, or communicated to his people except by the mediation of some personal representative – who is therefore authoritative.

Hobbes draws a line of unbroken succession all the way from Abraham, through Moses, the High Priests, Judges, Kings, Prophets, Jesus Christ, Apostles, and ecclesiastical successors to the Apostles, to the first Christian monarch Constantine.⁵⁴ From that momentous 4th century transfer point onward, God is now forever “Personated” by civil monarchs, in whom is therefore “all authority, both in Religion, and Policy.”⁵⁵ Hobbes insists that the heated collision of Pope and monarch through the ages merely reinforces this truth about God’s representation: “If the Kingdom of God...were not a Kingdom which God by his Lieutenants, or Vicars, who deliver his Commandments to the people, did exercise on Earth; there would not have been so much contention, and war, about who it is, by whom God speaketh to us; neither would many Priests have troubled themselves with Spiritual Jurisdiction, nor any King have denied it them.”⁵⁶

Hobbes shares with the Roman Catholic Church an interest in proving the legitimacy of representative mediation throughout Scripture, with heavy emphasis upon the Old Testament. He is also particularly eager to demonstrate that all of God’s Old Testament representatives were

⁵³ *Lev.* 42:3

⁵⁴ *Lev.* 16:12/33:20/40:5/40:11/42:18/42:86

⁵⁵ *Lev.* 16:12/40:11

⁵⁶ *Lev.* 35:13

also Civil Sovereigns (Moses and the High Priests included)⁵⁷ nominated by popular consent.⁵⁸

But the larger concern here is obviously one for tradition, for precedent, and for continuity. With Rome, Hobbes is arguing that God established this pattern from the beginning, and that it ought therefore to continue in perpetuity. According to Scripture, “*the Scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses’ chair, and therefore All that they shall bid you observe, that observe and do.*” By this reasoning, all successors to Moses through the ages deserve the same “simple obedience.”⁵⁹

Hobbes on Simple Obedience

“Simple obedience” is blind; it is the sort of abject surrender exhibited by “those that are subject to Paternal or Despotical Dominion,” either children or slaves.⁶⁰ Hobbes has in mind a specific religious culture as well – that of “Monks, and Friars, that are bound by Vow to that simple obedience to their Superior, to which every Subject ought to think himself bound by the Law of Nature to the Civil Sovereign.”⁶¹ As subjects, Hobbes demands that we “Captivate our Understanding and Reason,” that we “speak, as (by lawful Authority) we are commanded,” and that we “live accordingly; which in sum, is Trust, and Faith reposed in him that speaketh, though the mind be incapable of any Notion at all from the words spoken.”⁶² We must literally become like children in order to enter the kingdom.

This relinquishment is voluntary and deliberate. No matter how smart, perceptive, discriminating, or wise any individual might be, he willing gives it up – he submits his will and

⁵⁷ Lev. 40:2/40:9/40:14/42:65/42:97/42:118

⁵⁸ Lev. 20:16/26:41/35:7/42:6

⁵⁹ Lev. 20:16

⁶⁰ Lev. 20:16/20:10/30:11

⁶¹ Lev. 46:32

⁶² Lev. 32:4

his judgment to another, who will judge and act *for* him.⁶³ In this sense, “every particular man is Author of all the Sovereign doth; and consequently he that complaineth of injury from his Sovereign, complaineth of that whereof he himself is Author; and therefore ought not to accuse any man but himself.”⁶⁴ For Hobbes there is only one truly inalienable right which can never be transferred or resigned: man’s primal urge to protect his life. Faced with sure death, even justly by the hand of his Sovereign, he may resist. “He is totally Excused” from his legal obligations “because no Law can oblige a man to abandon his own preservation.”⁶⁵

For this reason, the prospect of war presents Hobbes with a thorny dilemma. “No man is bound...either to kill himself or any other man,” so in “many cases” a subject may justly refuse to follow his Sovereign into battle.⁶⁶ These “many cases” are actually quite few in number, but for certain scholars, the damage is already done; to concede even the *possibility* of thoughtful, self-interested insubordination is to effectively dismantle the power of illiberal Sovereignty. Hobbes’ “simple obedience” collapses under the pressure of a million individual interests, suddenly empowered to judge their Sovereign’s “protection” against subjective and introspective appraisals of “safety.” The fact that *Leviathan*’s gloriously logical integrity breaks down and is rendered almost completely incomprehensible upon such a reading should be caution enough.

Only a shrewd liberal would interpret Hobbes in this manner; the vulnerability is simply too irresistible not to exploit. The various themes of “self-interest,” “obedience for protection,” and “contractual obligation,” combined with the celebrated test example from the battlefield – all these points could be juxtaposed in such a way as to severely undermine Hobbes’ otherwise

⁶³ Lev. 17:3

⁶⁴ Lev. 18:6/20:13/21:10

⁶⁵ Lev. 27:3/27:25

⁶⁶ Lev. 21:15-17

glowing illiberal credentials and expose him as a “proto-liberal.” But nothing could be further from his intention, and Hobbes himself anxiously clarifies: “When the defense of the commonwealth requireth at once the help of all...everyone is obliged, because otherwise the institution of the commonwealth, which they have not the purpose or courage to preserve, was in vain.”⁶⁷ He is so alarmed by the prospect of misinterpretation on this point that he strongly reiterates it in the final chapter of the work.

*“Every man is bound by nature, as much as in him lieth, to protect in war the authority by which he is himself protected in time of peace.”*⁶⁸ Only the horrible reality of “present death,” only the brutal immediacy of flying bullets and fallen comrades could possibly dissuade a man from the privilege of defending his Sovereign. It may seem absurd that he would not consider potential dangers or risks until the gun were pointed at his head; it may seem ridiculous that he would ignore the warning signs implied in a declaration of war; it may seem unreasonable that he would not try to evade the enlistment or resist military engagement until he was in the very heat of battle. It may seem incredible that individuals would not regard rampant corruption, or economic failure, or high taxation, or increased crime, or international pressures, or domestic incompetence as a lapse in promised protection. But this is *precisely* what Hobbes is arguing.

To appreciate why requires sympathy and a full appreciation of the unique illiberal culture “simple obedience.” To obey like a child or slave is not to question or review or judge. For Hobbes, the period of self-interested scrutiny exists in the State of Nature, but once the ink has dried on the contract of obligation, it is neither rational nor legal to weigh one’s options or flirt with rebellion. Certainly “the Obligation of Subjects to the Sovereign, is understood to last

⁶⁷ *Lev.* 21:16

⁶⁸ *Lev.* Review and Conclusion:5

as long, and no longer, than the power lasteth, by which he is able to protect them.”⁶⁹ But “who shall Judge? Shall a private man Judge, when the question is of his own obedience?”⁷⁰ Hobbes’ “simple obedience” demands a religious fervor of blind belief in the substance of protection *hoped* for, the evidence of which may often be unseen – “in sum, Trust, and Faith, reposed in him” who has pledged.

Hobbes on Roman Catholicism

Hobbes needed religion. He needed the fear of God driven into the hearts of grateful and cringing subjects. He also needed the very specific power of post-Reformation Roman Catholicism. No other wing of Christianity embodied that uncompromising animus of absolute ecclesiastical sovereignty. No other persuasion communicated that severe intolerance for “private interpretations.” No other faith expressed that holy horror of dissent – so Thomas Hobbes coveted Roman Catholic authority with greedy resentment. Protestant authority was an oxymoron, with its culture of rebellion, dispute, and so-called “liberty of conscience.” While Hobbes loathed Protestantism (particularly Presbyterianism), he reserved his strongest objections for *Behemoth*, almost as if he was unwilling to dilute the philosophic grandeur of *Leviathan* with obviously inferior prattle.

Catholicism, on the other hand, was a more worthy opponent. Hobbes didn’t have to go twelve exhausting rounds with Rome as he did with the Protestant liberals, explaining authority, defining liberty, demanding obedience, forbidding dissent. The Church at Rome already appreciated undivided sovereignty. The Pope claimed to be monarch of the church, Vicar of Christ, supreme pastor, sole judge, infallible arbiter, and avenging magistrate (qualified to define

⁶⁹ *Lev.* 21:21

⁷⁰ *Lev.* 43:22

heresy and impose excommunication).⁷¹ Hobbes had only one problem with this: all of these offices and functions, while entirely appropriate, belonged to his Civil Sovereign.⁷² Much of *Leviathan* is therefore simply an intramural spat between philosophic allies.

Certain aspects of Roman Catholicism certainly irritated Hobbes more than others. He couldn't stomach transubstantiation, for instance, so this doctrine is given almost immoderate emphasis throughout his discourse. At one point he even apologizes for his fixation "in a work of this nature, where I pretend to nothing but what is necessary to the doctrine of Government and Obedience." But he could not ignore Catholicism's unique power to change bread into God. "Who will not obey a Priest, that can make God, rather than his Sovereign?"⁷³ Political insubordination is the real issue here, not transubstantiation. If the Civil Sovereign "make God," Hobbes refuses to judge.⁷⁴ He expects his own Sovereign to administer the Eucharist,⁷⁵ and appears to have no problem with transubstantiation so long as the right man performs it.

Among other petty frustrations, the self-serving ambition of the Catholic clergy galled Hobbes, and he frequently complains about the number of points necessary for salvation which are also "manifestly to the advantage of the Pope, and his spiritual subjects."⁷⁶ On the other hand, he loudly celebrates the same attitude in his own Civil Sovereign, and praises monarchy for ingeniously reconciling the egocentric interests of Sovereignty with those of the governed.⁷⁷ Unperturbed by the obvious hypocrisy, Hobbes dryly admonishes, "To die for every tenet that

⁷¹ Lev. 42:31/42:84/42:89/42:92/42:115/42:123/42:133/44:6/47:23, *Beh.* Dialogue 1, p.8

⁷² Lev. 20:3/35:15/42:21-24/42:79/42:81/42:93/42:106/42:130-131, *Beh.* Dialogue 1, p.8-9

⁷³ Lev. 46:18

⁷⁴ Lev. 37:13

⁷⁵ Lev. 42:72

⁷⁶ Lev. 12:32

⁷⁷ Lev. 19:4/30:21

serveth the ambition, or profit of the Clergy, is not required,”⁷⁸ another highly ironic statement given his own difficulties concerning military desertion of the Civil Sovereign.

These minor objections are so shallow, sanctimonious, and immature that they might seem unworthy of Hobbes. But he succumbs to trivial bickering with Rome because fundamentally they have very little else to fight over. Protestantism was of an entirely different spirit, however. According to Hobbes, any so-called church which is not united under one Christian Sovereign “hath no authority at all.”⁷⁹ He carefully defined “church” as “*a company of men professing Christian religion, united in the person of one Sovereign,*” which effectively disenfranchised all Protestant denominations except Anglican. “If Pastors be not subordinate to another, so as that there may be one chief Pastor, men will be taught contrary Doctrines, whereof both may be, and one must be false.”⁸⁰

For Hobbes and the Roman Catholic Church, authority resides in strength, and strength in unity, and unity in obedience to one Representative of God. Both parties heaped scorn upon the Protestant concept of “Scriptural authority,” and vehemently forbade any lay appeals to God’s Word over their own. “The question of the Authority of the Scriptures is reduced to this,” writes Hobbes, “*Whether Christian Kings, and the Sovereign Assemblies in Christian Commonwealths, be absolute in their own Territories, immediately under God; or subject to one Vicar of Christ, constituted over the Universal Church.*”⁸¹ With this brusque gesture, Hobbes effectively dismissed all Protestant persuasions from the debate, including the Anglicans.⁸² In one

⁷⁸ Lev. 42:13

⁷⁹ Lev. 33:24

⁸⁰ Lev. 39:4-5

⁸¹ Lev. 33:24

⁸² The 39 Articles of Religion, Article 6 and 20

movement, he destroyed *Sola Scriptura* and submitted the very Word of God to the authority of man.

Hobbes on Scripture, Law, and Education

Lacking Rome's greater delicacy on this matter, Hobbes parses with complete candor: "When we believe that the Scriptures are the word of God, having no immediate revelation from God himself, our Belief, Faith, and Trust is in the Church; whose word we take, and acquiesce therein... So that it is evident, that whatsoever we believe, upon no other reason, then what is drawn from authority of men only, and their writings; whether they be sent from God or not, is Faith in men only."⁸³ The Scripture exists because it was declared to be so by the authority of man, for "it is not the Writer, but the authority of the Church that maketh a book Canonical."⁸⁴ The Church does not receive or acknowledge; the Church *creates*. Rome argued that the ecclesiastical magisterium had this power; Hobbes argued that civil sovereigns did.⁸⁵

But either way, the Protestants were absolutely prohibited from appealing to God's Word over Church authority, or otherwise locating "sovereignty" in Scripture. Martin Luther famously pleaded that his conscience was held captive by the Word of God (rather than ecclesiastical authority), in defense of his own dissenting interpretation of it. But Hobbes regards this sentiment to be irrational, illegal, and "repugnant to Civil Society."⁸⁶ For "if men were at liberty, to take for God's Commandments, their own dreams, and fancies... scarce two men would

⁸³ *Lev. 7:7*

⁸⁴ *Lev. 33:20*

⁸⁵ *Lev. 33:1/42:37,39/42:47/43:6*

⁸⁶ *Lev. 29:7*

agree.”⁸⁷ The vaunted Reformation right of individuals “to be judge of the meaning of Scripture” destroys “the peace of any Christian kingdom...It is this doctrine that divides a kingdom within itself.”⁸⁸ The Church at Rome could certainly vouch for that.

Hobbes praises the Pope for withholding the Scriptures as long as he could, and for preventing the laity from interpreting the text. “For after the Bible was translated into English, every man, nay, every boy and wench, that could read English, thought they spoke with God Almighty, and understood what he said, when by a certain number of chapters a day they had read the Scriptures once or twice over.”⁸⁹ He splutters, “The Scriptures are hard,”⁹⁰ and require authoritative interpretation, not the inadequate, indulgent, and dangerous musings of “private men.” He who is Sovereign should either interpret himself, or “authorize an Interpreter; whose Interpretation should generally be stood to.”⁹¹ And Hobbes doesn’t care if the Civil Sovereign authorizes *Rome* as interpreter, as long as the Pope understands that he is a hireling and a tutor.⁹²

Hobbes appreciated the power of political theology. Men who clamor about “*Sola Scriptura*,” and imagine that they are governed by God’s Word rather than God’s Lieutenant, are the same men who draw from Aristotle’s *Politics* “that in a well ordered Commonwealth, not Men should govern, but the Laws.” Moreover, “For a Private man...to Interpret the Law by his own Spirit, is another Error in the *Politics*,”⁹³ eagerly seized upon by Protestants who demonstrate the same brazen proclivity with regard to Scripture. Aristotle’s *Politics* had only

⁸⁷ *Lev.* 26:41

⁸⁸ *Behem.* Dialogue 1, p.50

⁸⁹ *Behem.* Dialogue 1, p.21-22

⁹⁰ *Behem.* Dialogue 1, p.9

⁹¹ *Lev.* 42:35

⁹² *Lev.* 42:70,80

⁹³ *Lev.* 46:37-38

fomented rebellion, bred dispute, and wrought devastating insurrection against undivided Sovereignty, to the great harm of all absolute monarchs, both ecclesiastical and secular.⁹⁴

But illiberal theology tends to “make the people the more obedient.”⁹⁵ Hobbes knew to look toward the Church at Rome for an appropriate spirit of governance. The magisterium ruled the Church under their own monarch Pope and under no circumstances encouraged or permitted lay review of their sayings, actions, or authority. In codifying their sacred text, Rome essentially claimed authority over it, to interpret, to enforce, and to expand upon them with explanatory decrees and laws as may be necessary or expedient. To all these commands, Catholicism demanded of its people unqualified submission, and regarded all acts of disobedience, rebellion, or insubordination “heresy.”⁹⁶ Hobbes denounced the Church at Rome for usurpation and fraud, but only because these powers, functions, and rights properly belonged to the realm of politics.

In *Leviathan*, he shamelessly employs every single one of them. Hobbes insists that the Civil Sovereign has the authority to codify Natural Law⁹⁷ with whatever decrees he thinks appropriate,⁹⁸ to require simple obedience,⁹⁹ and to prosecute disobedience as “heresy.”¹⁰⁰ All laws “have need of Interpretation,”¹⁰¹ and “whosoever hath a lawful power over any Writing, to make it Law, hath the power also to approve or disapprove the interpretation of the same.”¹⁰² Hobbes forbids any exercise of popular review, as if the legislative Sovereign might be required

⁹⁴ *Behem*. Dialogue 1, p.41-44

⁹⁵ *Lev*. 33:20

⁹⁶ *Lev*. 33:20/42:89/44:6/46:32

⁹⁷ *Lev*. 26:8

⁹⁸ *Lev*. 15:41/21:18

⁹⁹ *Lev*. 26:1

¹⁰⁰ *Lev*. 42:130

¹⁰¹ *Lev*. 26:21

¹⁰² *Lev*. 33:25

to explain himself or otherwise defend his commands. His laws are just because they are simply his laws, there being no external, immaterial, invisible standard of “right,” “good,” “just,” or “godly” above and beyond his estimation of those qualities.¹⁰³ There exists no appeal process to something higher –either to conscience, Natural Law, Scripture, or God himself.

Disobedience is *sin*.¹⁰⁴ To “dispute of Sovereign Power,” to dissent from monarchy, to question authority, to debate over law¹⁰⁵ – these are dysfunctions which destroy the “real unity” of the body politic. For the harmony of the commonwealth “is more than consent, or concord;” it is an almost sacred union, a “plurality of voices” speaking as one, a general will made up of those who voluntarily relinquish their selfish, individual interests, and submit them *en masse* to “that Mortal God” on earth who saves them from themselves.¹⁰⁶ Hobbes deliberately presents his secular commonwealth as a mystical (but corporate) body no less profound than that of Rome, and its betrayal at the hands of individual mavericks as moral tragedy and traitorous sacrilege.

But so say all illiberal leaders. Their ordered schemes for society are often introduced in such a high pitched fervor of visionary utopia and with such blithe confidence in the good reason of the populace, that the incredible reality of popular dissent rapidly and irrevocably erases any aspect of benign generosity. The ungrateful intransigence of insubordinate individuals only confirms for illiberals a central tenet of their philosophy: single persons cannot be expected to understand what is good for them on their own – they must be told. Typical reeducation programs have two features: the first is negative, a strict censorship of objectionable materials

¹⁰³ *Lev.* 20:16/30:20

¹⁰⁴ *Lev.* 27:1

¹⁰⁵ *Lev.* 20:19/18:3/29:8/29:6

¹⁰⁶ *Lev.* 17:13

which overtly undermine. And the second is positive, a targeted indoctrination on core principles, with strong emphasis on “obedience” and “submission.”

Like any good illiberal, Hobbes bemoans the ignorance of the populace,¹⁰⁷ but he also brightly suggests that people “are like clean paper, fit to...be imprinted” with whatsoever the Public Authority thinks best, rather than “scribbled over with the opinions” of subversive teachers.¹⁰⁸ In order to prevent the latter scenario, Hobbes frequently proposes the systemic reform of the universities,¹⁰⁹ including the selective censorship of specific authors and themes.¹¹⁰ He urges the Civil Sovereign “to instruct men in the nature” of his Representative office and “the reasons of those his essential Rights,”¹¹¹ and to “examine all the Doctrines of all books before they be published” in order to most efficiently control and shape the opinions of the people. “For the Actions of men proceed from their Opinions.”¹¹²

For such mature illiberal communities, the concept of immediate “self-interest” takes a backseat to blind belief and obedience, whether justified by the evidence or not. “The People are to be taught...that they ought not to be in love with any form of Government they see in their neighbor Nations, more than with their own, nor (whatsoever present prosperity they behold in Nations that are otherwise governed than they,) to desire change.”¹¹³ They may also be prevented from deciding for themselves where they will live and work. Hobbes strongly discourages dependence upon the uncertain “Charity of private persons,” in favor of dependence upon Public

¹⁰⁷ *Behem.* Dialogue 1, p.39

¹⁰⁸ *Lev.* 30:6

¹⁰⁹ *Lev.* 1:5/30:13/Review and Conclusion:16

¹¹⁰ *Lev.* 46:42

¹¹¹ *Lev.* 19:3/30:3

¹¹² *Lev.* 18:9

¹¹³ *Lev.* 30:7

Authority, the seat of a control economy equipped to determine all industrial pursuits and appropriately allocate laborers toward them.¹¹⁴

Individual initiative entails significant risk. But illiberal communities absorb that risk by transferring it to the shoulders of leadership. Central planners guarantee economic prosperity to each individual if they will only labor, produce, and distribute as directed. Political dictators guarantee social security to each individual if they will only yield and perform upon command. And religious clergy guarantee redemptive pardon to each individual if they will only submit to ecclesiastical supervision. Illiberalism demands obedience for protection, and dutiful subservience for security. But liberalism fosters the opposite attitude, because individual risk also implies individual responsibility, ownership, and reward. Men who ultimately answer for their own economic success, private safety, or religious weal generally exude a self-consciously independent disposition and may occasionally engage in ecclesiastical or civil disobedience.

Hobbes to Schmitt

Hobbes' political philosophy is incompatible with virtually every Reformation motif. Along with their ancient Roman and Greek counterparts, Hobbes charged the Protestants with gross philosophic error regarding freedom, obedience, and sovereignty. But Catholicism was a different matter. Hobbes thoughtfully observed that "in the Church of Rome, the principal virtues are, to obey their doctrine...to be beneficial to the clergy...and to believe upon their word."¹¹⁵ He may have closed out his *Leviathan* caustically lampooning the Pope as Oberon, the fairy king of his own imaginary kingdom.¹¹⁶ But at least the Roman Church was a *kingdom*. At least the

¹¹⁴ *Lev.* 30:18-19

¹¹⁵ *Behem.* Dialogue 1, p.46-47

¹¹⁶ *Lev.* 47:22-33

Pope knew how to behave as a reputable sovereign, as a Vicar, as Prophet, Priest, and King. He demanded the sort of obedience that made Protestants protest and petulantly carry on about how that triad of mediatory roles were “fulfilled” and abolished in Christ.

But Hobbes knew better. His Civil Sovereign was Prophet: for “whosoever in a Christian Commonwealth holdeth the place of Moses, is the sole Messenger of God, and Interpreter of his Commandments.”¹¹⁷ His Civil Sovereign was Priest: for “every Christian bishop is not only a bishop, but an archbishop...to whom God hath committed the charge of all the souls of his subjects.”¹¹⁸ And his Civil Sovereign was King – a monarch as of a Peculiar Kingdom, a “*Sacerdotal Kingdom...a Kingdom of Priests...a Royal Priesthood...a Priesthood of Kings.*”¹¹⁹ This was no fairy kingdom, invisible diocese, spiritual sovereignty, or metaphysical might. Hobbes had poached Catholic authority and fortified it with real secular power. He triumphantly pronounced, “Every Christian Prince, as I have formerly proved, is no less Supreme Pastor of his own Subjects, than the Pope of his.”¹²⁰

Statements like these implied to German theorist Carl Schmitt that “Reformation and Counterreformation point in the same direction.”¹²¹ A devout Roman Catholic himself, Schmitt hopefully suggested that “Thomas Hobbes *brought the Reformation to a conclusion,*”¹²² but nothing could be further from the case. Hobbes wrote as a man out of his time, a relic of outmoded politics and traditionalist religion, a cranky conservative standing outside the whirl of

¹¹⁷ *Lev.* 36:13-14,20/40:7/42:104

¹¹⁸ *Behem.* Dialogue 1, p.14

¹¹⁹ *Lev.* 35:12

¹²⁰ *Lev.* 42:131

¹²¹ Schmitt, Carl, and G. L. Ulmen. *Roman Catholicism and political form (RC)*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1996. Print. xv-xvi

¹²² Schmitt, Carl. *Political theology II: the myth of the closure of any political theology (PT2)*. Cambridge: Polity, 2008. Print. 125

revolutionary fervor and shouting for it to stop. But the dizzying kaleidoscope of complementary protests spun faster, and the groundswell din of demands over religion, politics, and economics easily drowned out Hobbes' reactionary warnings. The power which he wished to grant the State steadily became less plausible in inverse proportion to the growing strength of the Reformation.

Henry VIII's Act of Supremacy (1534) could have bestowed upon England's Civil Sovereign the ecclesiastical authority which Hobbes would advocate, but in practice the potential ministerial functions were never realized. Henry seemed uninterested in anything more than official independence from bossy Rome. Mary completely overturned the Act (1554), and by the time Elizabeth readopted it in 1559, Protestantism had gained enough power to significantly nuance the title, locking away from the Civil Sovereign any true power over the ecclesiastical or doctrinal functions of any church.¹²³ What Hobbes proposed in *Leviathan* (1651) had never really had its day, but the opportune moment for a strong monarchical "Vicar of Christ" was long over. England's period of absolute *secular* sovereignty was also dwindling fast.

Popularly attacked, ostracized, and ignored, Hobbes continued to bitterly prophesy that liberalism would surely ruin everyone's chance for peace, freedom, and prosperity. He did not live long enough to behold the inevitable: a mass exodus of impassioned Protestants from the Commonwealth across the ocean to fully realize their reverence for ancient Greco politics. He did not see them proudly adopt republican "mixarchy," or watch their efforts at promoting "liberty of conscience," or endure their work ethic, or tolerate their deep obeisance to Adam's Smith's "invisible hand" as a governing principle. He would certainly never have predicted that in short order that dubiously founded community would become the most free, prosperous, and powerful nation in the world.

¹²³ *The 39 Articles of Religion*, Article 37

America was a unique case. No other nation had the opportunity to construct a new liberal order *ex nihilo*, ease its birth pangs, or coddle indulgently when liberalism faltered or froze. Most sovereign states struggled to gradually implement liberal reforms, hoping to avoid the utter devastation of a Peasants' Revolt or Thirty Years' War, but largely resigned to some amount of intermediate conflict, chaos, and rebellion. By the 20th century, for better or worse, virtually all nations on the European continent had overthrown, marginalized, or constitutionally circumscribed their respective monarchies in favor of popularly elected, republican structures. Many of these transitions had not gone well, and a few left such dissatisfying vacuums of leadership and vision that they provoked a somewhat predictable rash of dictatorships.

Germany's Weimar Republic succumbed to this fate, and amongst the spate of angry jeremiads which mourned over ancient paths abandoned and foretold a day of reckoning, Carl Schmitt lifted his voice in protest of Protestantism along with its various political and economic manifestations. Many of his numerous theoretical essays are warmly written; they capture Schmitt's real anguish, his pain, frustration, and dismay over the deteriorating condition of his fatherland. They also communicate his obvious pride in tradition, and particularly in the economic and political legacy of his faith, Roman Catholicism. Contrary to the modern spirit of indifference to doctrinal confession, Schmitt stubbornly maintained the political power of theology and insisted that "all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts."¹²⁴

Schmitt on Political Theology

¹²⁴Schmitt, Carl. *Political theology: four chapters on the concept of sovereignty (PT)*. University of Chicago Press ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005. Print. 36

Monarch is king as God is king: this is the simplest analogy shared by religion and politics, and one which Schmitt does not deny.¹²⁵ But the concept of political theology runs deeper than this obvious connection. It is “a polymorphous phenomenon... There are many political theologies because there are, on the one hand, many different religions, and, on the other, many different kinds and methods of doing politics.”¹²⁶ Theology grapples with the same issues as politics (right and wrong, authority, freedom, law, governance, etc.), and also attempts to unpack man’s true nature with regard to reality, the method by which he knows anything, the authority which governs him, and the rationale by which it claims legitimacy.

Schmitt argued that theology preceded modern politics, historically and conceptually¹²⁷ – which is to imply a relationship of causation. Whether or not he comprehensively proves this point, Schmitt is far more successful establishing *correlation* between the two, and insightfully revealing the dynamic of interplay between them. This complex (and controversial) exercise demands skill, precision, and delicacy; Schmitt often appears ill-equipped for the task. His emotional demeanor ran hot – prone to sharply abrupt judgment as well as effusively credulous endorsement – and it is likely that he allowed his significant abilities as a jurist, philosopher, and theorist to be compromised by overweening disdain for his opponents, and handicapped by obvious partiality for one exclusive theology and its equally specific political counterpart.

But this is actually Schmitt’s finest contribution to the field. The best evidence and example of “political theology” is that of Carl Schmitt’s own. His works progress from youthful religiosity to mature political discourse: *The Visibility of the Church* (1917), *Political Theology* (1922), *Roman Catholicism and Political Form* (1923), *Concept of the Political* (1927), and *The*

¹²⁵ *PT*, 38-39, 46/RC, 12

¹²⁶ *PT2*, 66

¹²⁷ *PT*, 36

Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes (1938), among others. Schmitt completed his last book in 1970 – *Political Theology II*, another heavily theological work which reiterated his original premise. There is no doubting Schmitt’s sincerity on this matter, and the full body of his thought provides a fairly consistent and reliable pattern for all political perspectives organically drawn from doctrinal faith.

Schmitt on Pessimism and Fear

Schmitt’s theology begins with hell: *people*, being themselves and obeying themselves. This is also Thomas Hobbes’ hell, although he calls it the State of Nature. For both men, individualism always disturbs the peace, and creates an untenable climate of dysfunction, chaos, and fear. This last quality, however, is a redeeming grace, for it “drives anguished individuals to come together... A spark of reason flashes, and a consensus emerges about the necessity to submit to the strongest power.”¹²⁸ Terror is a precious commodity for any illiberal, because it effectively justifies and legitimizes absolute authority. Security, order, peace, and unity – these become rewards for obedience and submission. If the requisite amount of fear has not already naturally gripped the populace, illiberal leaders often *induce* it.

People have to feel a need for salvation. In religious circles, this need is derived from frequent references to man’s fallen state, his unrighteousness and impending doom. The severity of the predicament may be simply stated, it may be downplayed, or it may be embellished, depending on the doctrinal convictions or implicit aims of any given religious community. Calvinism, for instance, maintains man’s total depravity as a fundamental reality; Catholicism

¹²⁸ Schmitt, Carl, and George Schwab. *The Leviathan in the state theory of Thomas Hobbes: meaning and failure of a political symbol (LST)*. University of Chicago Press ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008. Print. 31,33

does not. When a Roman Catholic emphasizes the “absolute sinfulness and depravity of human nature,”¹²⁹ he is doing so polemically and rhetorically, knowing that a plummeting “fall from grace” grants a “will to world power. Like every worldwide imperialism that has reached its goal, the Church seeks to bring peace to the world.”¹³⁰

Schmitt is careful in his statements concerning humanity’s depravity. As a Catholic, he believed in the dogma of Original Sin, which “asserts not absolute worthlessness but only distortion, opacity, or injury, and leaves open the possibility of natural good.”¹³¹ “The freedom-of-choice aspect prevails and weakens the doctrine of the radical evilness of man.”¹³² As an illiberal, however, Schmitt can’t help but admire the more incautious statements on this theme made by others. He approvingly references Dostoyevsky’s Grand Inquisitor, who “knows that man is by nature evil and vile, a cowardly rebel who needs a master,”¹³³ and devotes the last chapter of *Political Theology* to several counterrevolutionary Catholic philosophers who make Hobbes’ “nasty, brutish” imagery look like child’s play.

Spanish theorist Donoso Cortés (1809-1853) takes the cake. “Humanity reels blindly through a labyrinth that we call history...a boat aimlessly tossed about on the sea and manned by a mutinous, vulgar, forcibly recruited crew.” He was at the time criticized by a few of his Catholic compatriots, who “voiced misgivings about his exaggeration of the natural evil and unworthiness of man.” And Schmitt certainly concedes: “What Donoso Cortés had to say about the natural depravity and vileness of man was indeed more horrible than anything that had ever

¹²⁹ *PT*, 57

¹³⁰ *RC*, 32

¹³¹ *PT*, 57

¹³² Schmitt, Carl. *The concept of the political (CP)*. Expanded ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007. Print. 64n

¹³³ *RC*, 32

been alleged by an absolutist philosophy of the state in justifying authoritarian rule...He was even more horrified than a Puritan.”¹³⁴ But Schmitt ultimately defends Cortés, because after all, rebellion (in this case anarchism) deserves stringent measures.

Political exigency *demands* them. “As soon as Donoso Cortés realized that the period of monarchy had come to an end...He demanded a political dictatorship.” Schmitt acknowledges that by all normal standards, despotism is “not legitimacy.” But “in the face of radical evil the only solution is dictatorship.”¹³⁵ The immediacy of extreme danger always reinforces Hobbes’ “eternal relation of protection and obedience” on which also rests the archaic feudal forms of “lord and vassal...patron and clients.”¹³⁶ Liberalism generally recoils from these formulas and questions the crisis, or at least the solution. Schmitt tautly defined the essence of liberalism as “negotiation, a cautious half measure, in the hope that the definitive dispute, the decisive bloody battle, can be transformed into a parliamentary debate and permit the decision to be suspended forever in everlasting discussion. Dictatorship is the opposite of discussion.”¹³⁷

Emergency situations call for decisive action – centralized, focused, and unencumbered by checks and balances or protests and debates. Even *The Federalist* admits as much: “The opposition of opinions and parties...are useful and necessary in the legislative; but not in the executive, where especially in times of war and disturbance actions must be energetic; to this belongs a unity of decision.”¹³⁸ The American founders certainly assumed that these relevant periods of “disturbance” would be infrequent rather than perpetual, but illiberals like Thomas

¹³⁴ *PT*, 57-58

¹³⁵ *PT*, 66

¹³⁶ *CP*, 52

¹³⁷ *PT*, 63

¹³⁸ Schmitt, Carl. *The crisis of parliamentary democracy (CPD)*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1988. Print. 45 (from *Federalist Papers*, No. 70).

Hobbes and Carl Schmitt had urgent ulterior motive to prolong the threat of emergency indefinitely. Defining the inalienable nature of man in terms of desperate warfare certainly creates this effect.

Regarding all manifestations of innocuous disagreement as “chaos” also guarantees a permanent (if artificial) State of Emergency. By this reasoning, Schmitt frequently insinuates that individualism, pluralism, and even democracy are all potential crises of the commonwealth, and should be treated as such.¹³⁹ For him, liberalism itself is a State of Emergency. But in the final analysis, Schmitt doesn’t care what scenario is considered dangerous, so long as an official State of Emergency is declared and expansive political powers are granted. Ideally, this assessment emanates voluntarily from the terrified populace,¹⁴⁰ but realistically it is usually the state which decides whether the situation is critical enough to warrant emergency authority: “To the state as an essentially political entity belongs the *jus belli*, i.e. the real possibility of deciding in a concrete situation upon the enemy.”¹⁴¹

Schmitt on Singular Authority

Specifically, for Schmitt, one person ought to decide the “exception.” He does so at his own discretion, with no reference to established precedent, procedures, routines, or rules,¹⁴² because the very nature of an *exceptional* situation frees him from normal modes and prescribed patterns. Schmitt delights in the *exception* – it is for him a weighty moment of decision and also of sovereignty, in which the entire political system realizes its chief end. He insists that the

¹³⁹ *LST*, 31,33,56-57

¹⁴⁰ *CP*, 49

¹⁴¹ *CP*, 45

¹⁴² *PT*, 6-7

exception “confirms not only the rule but also [the rule’s] existence,” which is thus entirely derivative,¹⁴³ an illogical statement unless it is interpreted in the light of *Leviathan*. Hobbes had all individuals voluntarily voting themselves out of the State of Nature. The mass election was obviously a truly communal decision,¹⁴⁴ and in this sense the Commonwealth preceded and begot the Sovereign.

But this implication could never stand with Hobbes; he vigorously denied that the Commonwealth had some existential being outside or before the creation of Sovereignty. The Civil Sovereign generated Commonwealth, not vice versa. And anyway, “if [the Sovereign] makes so many several Covenants as there be men, those Covenants after he hath the Sovereignty are void.”¹⁴⁵ Schmitt likewise has the normative *rule* rely for its existence upon the *exception*, because in “the autonomous moment of the decision...the norm is destroyed in the exception.”¹⁴⁶ This irrevocable decision point abolishes whatever once was regarded “norm” and installs a Sovereign who will shape a new norm, like phoenix rising from the ashes. Only in this way can it be said that the rule is derived from the exception.

Schmitt on Scripture and Law

It is the exception which demands, decides, and fashions a sovereign – one who will rise to the challenge and reinstate order out of chaos, one who will also “decide on the exception.”¹⁴⁷ According to the same principle, the sovereign belongs to “the normally valid legal system,” he

¹⁴³ *PT*, 15

¹⁴⁴ *Lev.* 17:13

¹⁴⁵ *Lev.* 18:4

¹⁴⁶ *PT*, 12

¹⁴⁷ *PT*, 5

stands outside it, and he also creates it.¹⁴⁸ All of this sounds circular because it is. The arguments revolve in a tightly wound cycle, much like the question of Scriptural authority: the Church gives authority to the Bible, the Church interprets the Bible, the Bible gives authority to the Church, the Church gives authority to the Bible, and so on, *ad infinitum*. The primary aim, whether employed by Hobbes, Schmitt, the Roman Church, or any other illiberal, is to completely confine the governed within the coiled bounds of human and material authority.

Round and round it goes with no escape: to appeal to a material code (to written law, for instance, or scripture) is merely to appeal to human authority which determines and interprets the code. “All law is ‘situational law.’ The sovereign...has the monopoly over the last decision.”¹⁴⁹ Catholicism reserves the same right: “It can deliberate as an equal partner with the state, and thereby create new law.”¹⁵⁰ Both parties own and control their respective law; it does not own or control them.¹⁵¹ Schmitt categorically rejects all juristic scholarship which maintains the opposite: that the *law* is sovereign, independent of the state, ratified (not created) by authority, or intended to hold political power in check.¹⁵² He is particularly displeased by the notion that “we no longer live under the authority of persons, be that natural or artificial (legal) persons, but under the rule of laws, (spiritual) forces.”¹⁵³

Protestantism fosters this spirit by consistently asserting the sovereignty of God’s Word, its independence from the church, and its authoritative judgment over all Christians, pastors included. The Scripture itself, not the church, saves God’s people. St. Paul’s words to the ancient

¹⁴⁸ *PT*, 13,31-32

¹⁴⁹ *PT*, 13

¹⁵⁰ *RC*, 30

¹⁵¹ *PT*, 8

¹⁵² *PT*, 18-19,21,23-25 *LST*, 66-67

¹⁵³ *PT*, 22

church at Rome became a Reformation battle cry: “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”¹⁵⁴ Salvation is not controlled, infused, administered, or otherwise bestowed by persons, and therefore ultimate reverence and obedience can never be due them. Illiberalism bristles at this reasoning, and whenever Thomas Hobbes quoted St. Paul, he was always careful to add a traditionally Catholic gloss: “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing our Lawful Pastors.”¹⁵⁵ The Word has no power on its own, inherently.

And law does not exist in some Lockean realm of eternal spirituality, voluntarily apprehended and obeyed with heart, soul, and conscience. Roman Catholicism traditionally gravitates more toward an Aristotelian aesthetic rather than Platonic, because the Church *embodies*: “The concrete historical process of the incarnation of Christ is bound with the concrete present – the visible institution that bears the unbroken chain.”¹⁵⁶ Physical, material, tangible, and objective realities ground Catholicism, in the same way that spiritual, immaterial, invisible, and subjective realities animate Protestantism. The dichotomy roughly corresponds to a “public” outlook on one hand, and a “private” on the other. Culturally and liturgically, the Catholic churches emphasize collective unity in the sacraments, while Protestant churches emphasize personal faith in the Word.

The concepts of “private” and “personal” directly derive from that of transcendent authority. “Appealing to law can signify that a higher or better law, a so-called natural law or law of reason, is set against the law of the *status quo*.” Such appeals allow the governed to break free from the illiberal feedback loop of authority, and Schmitt praised Hobbes for forbidding them:

¹⁵⁴ Romans 10:17

¹⁵⁵ Lev. 43:8/29:8

¹⁵⁶ Schmitt, Carl, and G. L. Ulmen. *The Visibility of the Church* (VC). Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1996. Print. 52-53

“He...emphasized time and again that the sovereignty of law means only the sovereignty of men who draw up and administer law. The rule of a higher order, according to Hobbes,” merely signified that “certain men of this higher order rule over men of a lower order.”¹⁵⁷ All law, ecclesiastical or civil, is publicly codified, and “there are no points of departure for a right to resist, irrespective of whether it be an objective or a subjective right.”¹⁵⁸

Schmitt on Public and Private

Leo Strauss didn’t read *Leviathan* this way; in his critical notes on Schmitt’s *Concept of the Political* he boldly portrayed Hobbes as a closet liberal – a man who allowed individuals to believe whatever they wanted, decide what was in their best interests, and resist rather than obey when the going got tough. Astonished and perplexed, Schmitt took a second look at Hobbes and then wrote his *Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes* as an indirect rejoinder to Strauss. To his chagrin, he had indeed discovered a “barely visible crack” in Hobbes’ otherwise ironclad approach, one which liberals would scrupulously exploit as Strauss had: the distinction between private and public. Apparently it did not matter to them that Hobbes had only allowed private belief as long as it remained truly remained private, i.e. *never spoken about in public*.

With reactionary ruthlessness, Schmitt responded by completely abolishing the private. If given an inch, the liberals and Protestants invariably take a mile, something Hobbes had obviously failed to appreciate. The very *separation* of public and private automatically “drives inner belief into the private domain...The soul of a people betakes itself on the ‘secret road’ that leads inward.”¹⁵⁹ Schmitt earnestly stressed “the importance of absorbing the right of private

¹⁵⁷ *CP*, 66-67

¹⁵⁸ *LST*, 46

¹⁵⁹ *LST*, 61

freedom of thought and belief into the political system,”¹⁶⁰ for to even admit the possibility of subjectivity is to plant “seeds of death” which destroy illiberal power. In this way Protestantism was able to single handedly shatter Christendom, and set in motion an inappropriate dynamic of decentralized individualism which quickly infected all aspects of society.

Schmitt on Economics

Schmitt tracks the inward proclivities of Protestantism, first from theology to economics: “Historically considered, ‘privatization’ has its origin in religion...If religion is a private matter, it also follows that privacy is revered.” From this viewpoint, “the unconditional guarantee of absolute private property can exist only where religion is a private matter, where it is...also the governing principle.”¹⁶¹ A passion for private *anything* is bad enough, but Schmitt also fumes over the stereotypical Protestant preoccupation economics. He wastes no time setting “economics” against “politics” and hastily pronouncing, “Economic thinking has its own reason and veracity in that it is absolutely material, concerned only with things. The political is considered immaterial, because it must be concerned with other than economic values.”¹⁶²

He paints Protestantism as “economic,” and therefore materialistic, while Catholicism represents “politics” and immaterial idealism – an odd judgment considering Protestantism’s philosophic retreat into the realm of the soul, and Catholicism’s fixations on physicality. The accusation appears to be one of “economic reductionism,” which more properly (and proudly) belongs to atheist communism, but Schmitt is insistent: “The materiality of economic-thinking

¹⁶⁰ *LST*, 57

¹⁶¹ *RC*, 28-29

¹⁶² *RC*, 16

capitalists is very close to that of a radical communism.”¹⁶³ In many ways, he actually *prefers* communism to capitalism, and this springs from a traditional Roman Catholic affinity for communitarianism.¹⁶⁴ Redistributive command economies are collective rather than individualist, and they usually call for strong centralized authority, both aspects of which resonate with Catholicism.

There’s something about capitalism which offends conservative Roman Catholicism, and it goes beyond “materialism.” The invisible hand of free-market economics is an audacious affront to illiberalism. It eschews visible, physical, personal intervention, and claims to serve the collectivity by *fostering* individualism rather than eradicating it. Capitalists have an almost religious faith in the inner workings of an invisible system they can’t control, and an incredible conviction in the virtue of personal selfishness, as if the good of the community will magically materialize from the combined contributions of a million self-absorbed interests. This economic thinking naturally proceeds from the same people who naively assume that an ideal political solution automatically springs from disputation, and a true interpretation of Scripture from the contradictory explanations of lay amateurs.

Schmitt thunders, “An alliance of the Catholic Church with the present form of industrial capitalism is not possible.”¹⁶⁵ The Church could never sanction a quasi-spiritual, individualist economic force which ticks along without human intervention and performs best under less authority rather than more. Early 20th century Roman Catholic philosophy introduced a fresh new concept of “personalism,”¹⁶⁶ with which Schmitt was certainly familiar – a modern religious

¹⁶³ *RC*, 35-36

¹⁶⁴ *PT*, 63 *CPD*, 70

¹⁶⁵ *RC*, 24

¹⁶⁶ Karol Wojtyła, Dietrich von Hildebrand

phenomenology which looked at first glance like a tentative foray into subjective individualism. More subtly, the groundbreaking movement merely distilled the traditional essence of Catholic understanding: persons are sacred. By this principle, Catholicism has always frowned upon the power of “forces,” “words,” or “things” over persons.

Schmitt on Personal Representation

According to this Catholic-infused argument, authority is *personal*, not impersonal. The law does not govern; people govern.¹⁶⁷ Reason does not decide; people decide. Word does not represent; people represent. “The idea of representation is so completely governed by conceptions of personal authority that the representative as well as the person represented must maintain a personal dignity – it is not a materialistic concept. To represent in an eminent sense can only be done by a person.”¹⁶⁸ Schmitt admits that liberalism also appropriates the term “representation,” by which it establishes a typically economic dynamic: politicians *specialize* in governance in order to allow the governed to specialize in other functions. They are merely hired “deputies,” subject to dismissal at any point.¹⁶⁹ This representation bears almost no relation to the representation maintained by Catholicism and also employed by Hobbes.

Radical representation takes upon itself an inalienable right and an absolute authority. To represent in this sense not simply to act on behalf of – it is also to embody profoundly, spiritually, and mystically, the way Adam transgressed for all humanity in the garden, the way Christ bore the sins of the world, the way Thomas Hobbes’ Civil Sovereign personally incorporates all the members of his commonwealth, and the way the Roman Catholic Church

¹⁶⁷ *CP*, 72-73

¹⁶⁸ *RC*, 21

¹⁶⁹ *RC*, 25-27

personifies Christ and his body. “The political power of Catholicism rests...on the absolute realization of authority...It has the power of representation. It represents the *civitas humana*. It represents in every moment the historical connection to the incarnation and crucifixion of Christ. It represents the Person of Christ Himself: God became man in historical reality.”¹⁷⁰

The Roman Catholic Church requires a very specific political form – a hierarchical monarchy – for “without it there is nothing to correspond to its intrinsically representative conduct.”¹⁷¹ According to Schmitt, the Church’s “greatest achievement” resides in “having made priesthood into an office – a very distinctive type of office. The pope is...the Vicar of Christ...He is not the functionary and commissar of republican thinking...His position is not impersonal, because his office is part of an unbroken chain linked with the personal mandate and concrete person of Christ.”¹⁷² This radical representation points in both directions; the pope represents Christ to his people, and represents his people to Christ. As in all illiberal thought, individuals within the community are not encouraged to interact with God directly.

They need mediation. Unlike the Protestant formula of “once for all” mediation – the finality of Christ’s atonement in which all other mediations cease and God’s people can subsequently seek his face directly – Catholic mediation “must be regenerated constantly...The unity of God assumes the form of a legal succession in the historicity of a mediation through mortal man, because only in this way could it be made visible in time. One God. One Church.”¹⁷³ This idea of corporate unity follows from that of mediation, and simultaneously undermines the power of individuality. “Man is not alone in the world...He is in the company of other men.

¹⁷⁰ RC, 18-19

¹⁷¹ RC, 25

¹⁷² RC, 14

¹⁷³ VC, 53,57

Thus he remains in his relation to God in the community and its mediation...A man totally dedicated to God is as little an individual as one totally immersed in the mundane world.”¹⁷⁴

Schmitt on Unity and Truth

The collectivity “always retains its unity, because God is also only one.”¹⁷⁵ All types of division or private right of dissent annihilate this image of oneness, the physical and visible manifestation of which is more important than the truth itself. “Everyone claims, of course, that right and truth is on his side. But the assertion of being in the right does not lead to peace.”¹⁷⁶ It leads instead to war – the “*bellum omnium contra omnes*. But sovereignty (and thus the state itself) resides in deciding this controversy.”¹⁷⁷ Order and harmony, without which the collectivity cannot flourish, proceed from authority, “not, as in the rationalist conception of the law in *Rechtsstaat* theories, truth and justice: *Auctoritas, non Veritas facit legem*...To an absolutist it is obvious.”¹⁷⁸

For Schmitt, and perhaps also for Hobbes, only one Sovereign can properly communicate unity and truth. “In the struggle of opposing interests and coalitions, absolute monarchy made the decision and thereby created the unity of the state. The unity that a people represents does not possess this decisionist character.”¹⁷⁹ It is the form of monarchy, of undivided sovereignty, a corporate head, a visual symbol of representation,¹⁸⁰ a mediation, and an “*unicum sui generis*,

¹⁷⁴ VC, 51

¹⁷⁵ VC, 57

¹⁷⁶ LST, 45

¹⁷⁷ PT, 9

¹⁷⁸ CPD, 43

¹⁷⁹ PT, 49

¹⁸⁰ RC, 21-22

with a monopoly of power ‘mystically reproduced,’”¹⁸¹ which Thomas Hobbes adopts for his “immense person” and earthly god.¹⁸² Schmitt triumphantly pronounced, “If a Christian obeys authority because it is grounded in and bound by God, he obeys God and not authority. This is the only revolution in world history that deserves to be called great – Christianity provided a new foundation for mundane authority.”¹⁸³

Perhaps it took a conservative Roman Catholic to fully appreciate Hobbes’ vision, but after the 1960s it became more difficult to say so. Vatican II subtly but discernibly capitulated toward Protestantism, liberalism, and capitalism, inducing dismayed chagrin from traditionalist quarters within the Church. Carl Schmitt dedicated his last book *Political Theology II* to Catholic theologian Hans Barion, an outspoken critic of Vatican II. Barion had previously offered “a crystal-clear analysis” of Schmitt’s youthful *Roman Catholicism and Political Form*, which he called “an *Elogium*” to Catholic power. But according to Barion, Vatican II had taken away the basis for Schmitt’s eulogy: “The time for Roman ecclesiastical triumphalism is over, and the glorious pomp of a form of power that impacted on the history of the world” is now defunct.¹⁸⁴

A Few Words on Illiberal Theology

Neither Barion nor Schmitt could accept the fact that the Roman Catholic Church was not an inherently illiberal institution, any more than Christianity was an inherently illiberal religion. The abstract conception of “illiberalism” transcends religion, economics, and politics. Like “liberalism,” it flexibly adapts in almost any social environment without shedding its

¹⁸¹ *PT*, 39

¹⁸² *PT*, 47

¹⁸³ *RC*, 51

¹⁸⁴ *PT2*, 47-48

distinguishing marks. No matter the institution, culture, discipline, or venue, illiberal politics looks a certain way, as does illiberal economics, and illiberal religion. When we speak broadly about any of them, we attest to a larger theoretical framework, a basic template which can be applied in a myriad of scenarios and circumstances. “Political theology” follows this same pattern. Certain variable features can be isolated from liberal or illiberal manifestations in order to construct descriptive template.

Simply from this brief analysis on Hobbes and Schmitt, it is possible to argue that **“illiberal theology” generally entails:**

- 1. Sovereignty in God’s representatives.** Transcendent deity is either hidden, far away, or otherwise inaccessible. The power and authority of God manifests itself in human form. *Politically*, this means that natural law (or any other form of transcendent “right”) is either hidden, confusing, or otherwise inaccessible. The power and authority of natural law manifests itself in human form.
- 2. Priesthood of elites.** Religious leaders intercede directly to Deity on behalf of the laity. Individuals cannot directly appeal to Deity for their own salvation. *Politically*, this means that political leaders engineer social, economic, and political good for the governed so that they don’t have to. Individuals cannot appraise, pursue, or acquire their own good for themselves.
- 3. Obedience to interpreters.** The sacred text is important, but not nearly as important as its interpretation. Only the religious elites interpret. *Politically*, this means that the law is important, but not nearly as important as its interpretation. Only the political elites interpret.

4. Unity over truth. Disputes over truth rend the visible unity of the religious community and therefore are prohibited. The religious elites pronounce on truth. *Politically*, this means that disputes over social, economic, and political goods rend the visible unity of the state and therefore are prohibited. The political elites pronounce on social welfare.

These core tenets of illiberal theology transcend Christianity; they can be discovered in many religions, particularly in those which hold a text sacred and therefore leave open the possibility of interpretive control. In many cases, illiberal theology will struggle with liberal theology within the same religion, as in the case of Christianity during the Reformation and its aftermath. Protracted tension may even turn violently physical (especially if illiberalism is entrenched) and almost always coincides with equally momentous social and political change. In the current scientific research on the various preconditions of democracy and liberalism, the effect of religion on politics often attracts considerable attention, as it should; the correlation is valid and of great import.

Unfortunately much of this research measures and tests religion on an inadequate or incomplete scale. The usual indicators of “religious affiliation” and “church attendance,” for instance, generally can’t capture those aspects of religion which have most political relevance, making it all the more remarkable when these methods do actually dredge up something of serious statistical significance. If polled, Thomas Hobbes would register as an Anglican (or if many political theorists had their way, as unaffiliated, agnostic, or atheist); Carl Schmitt would list Roman Catholic. Neither man probably did much in the way of consistent church attendance. The fact that both were deeply religious in their own way, that their theological convictions so

profoundly influenced their political perspectives, and that they thought completely alike – very little of this would record on a typical political survey.

The more complex dichotomy between liberal and illiberal theology is much more promising as a political indicator, but it requires more care. It might be useful for political scientists to develop new strategies for the collection of data on religious conviction. For instance, poll and survey questions could be better framed to ascertain philosophic preference, not simply formal affiliation. In an earlier confessional era, official creeds, denominational association, and parish participation provided a more straightforward and reliable testimony about an individual's religious, social, and political bent. The modern period of private religiosity and spiritual introspection does not typically yield the same concrete results with either consistency or precision.

Finally, it is important to note that both liberalism and illiberalism have a theology. Illiberal theology manifests itself in an overtly visible, physical, and corporate manner; its political counterpart exerts the same aggressively palpable presence, and political illiberalism loudly appeals to its correspondent theology with transparent directness. Schmitt admits that illiberal politics cannot “survive even a generation with only naked techniques of holding power. To the political belongs the idea, because there is no politics without authority and no authority without an ethos of belief.”¹⁸⁵ John Locke also questioned whether illiberalism could possibly maintain such overweening authority without some other ideological or theological assist, and Thomas Hobbes' work certainly illustrates this point with poignant clarity.

¹⁸⁵ *RC*, 17

But conversely, it is not accurate to assume that liberalism does not therefore need (or positively renounces) religion and theology. The doctrinal foundations of liberalism gravitate toward that which is quietly private, inward, and invisible; its political counterpart draws from these theological reserves in a similarly unobtrusive fashion. “No king but King Jesus” is a theological statement; even “Politics has no theology” is a theological statement, as Schmitt insightfully showed. But whatever it be, liberalism needs religious conviction, a sure moral authority, and a collective theology with as much urgency as illiberalism, lest the community be completely shattered in heedless individualism.

God is not on one side, liberal or illiberal; he is clearly on both. Liberalism foolishly errs when it denies or even neglects its own theology. If nothing else, liberalism could use it negatively, to rebut and defeat or at least cast a shadow of reasonable doubt over illiberal theology. And in a positive sense, religion has always and will continue to powerfully animate and strengthen politics; if the “priesthood of kings” disposes a commonwealth to greater obedience, then a “priesthood of all believers” can likewise impel individuals to stronger involvement and informed political participation, as it always has. When liberalism is ready to rediscover its theological roots, in an ironic twist, it will be illiberal works such as *Leviathan* and *Political Theology* which will certainly point the way, clear the path, and provide the pattern.